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A MATHEMATICAL ANALOGY IN THEOLOGICAL REASONING.

COMMENT ON DR. WILLIAM NORTH RICE'S BOOK "CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE."

IN the October issue of *The Open Court* there was a review of Professor Rice's book on *Christian Faith in an Age of Science*. The review drew attention to a mathematical illustration of what is set forth as a possible explanation of the resurrection of Christ, —not as a miracle, but as a possible instance of natural law.

The singularity of the argument attracted my attention, and having had, by the editor's kindness, an opportunity to read the work, the following additional remarks may not be out of place. So far as I can recall their statements, all writers on old style metaphysics have claimed that *moral* and *mathematical reasoning* differ wholly in their nature, and can not be applied to the same subject.

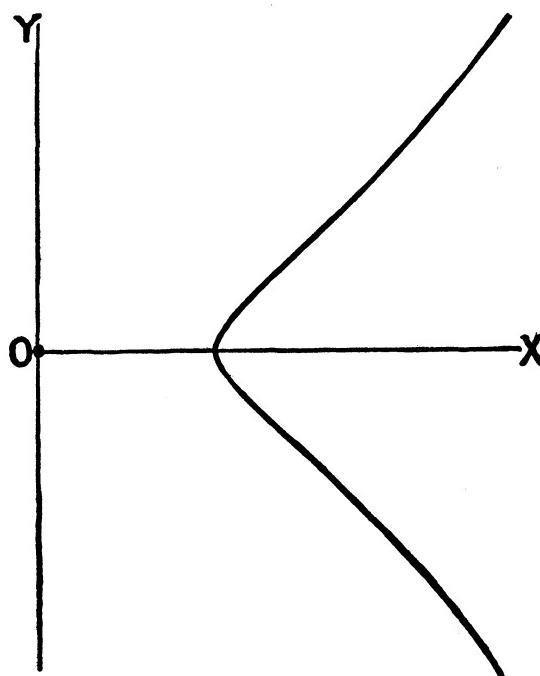
The Professor candidly states some of the difficulties which call for explanation, and he evidently accepts some of the results of the "higher criticism." In this paper I give attention only to the mathematical illustration—which if applicable at all, either proves nothing, or proves too much.

Dr. Rice gives a very good account of the way by which men have discovered and formulated a law of nature. He gives also a fair statement of the method by which mathematicians trace out curves of a simple kind; and then directly applies the same method to curves of the higher orders, where it can not possibly apply—as any one who makes the attempt will readily see. And yet this implied but erroneous application is made the basis of an argument to show that in a certain question of history, that which hitherto has

always been called a *miracle*, a contravention of a law of nature, was no miracle at all; or, at least, *might* be considered as an instance of natural law, even if a very unusual one.

So far as the x is concerned, the equation is of the third degree. This class of curves was quite fully treated by Newton, under five heads, under the name *Diverging Parabolus*.

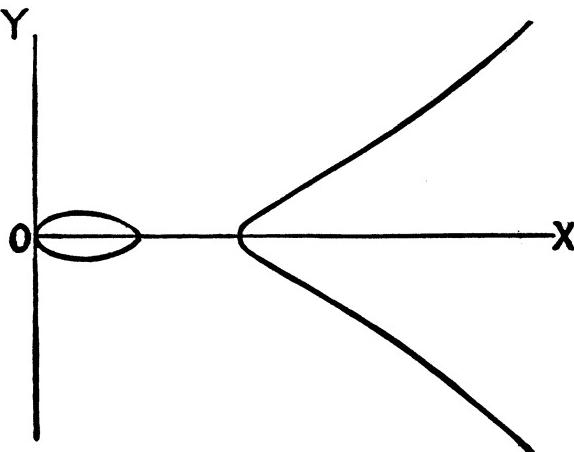
The x in an equation of the third degree, always has three values; and these values may be equal or unequal, positive or negative,



CURVE REPRESENTED BY EQUATION $ay = \pm x \sqrt{x-c}$.

whole or fractional, real or two of them may be imaginary. These different values give rise to the different curves. The particular form given by Dr. Rice requires that one value of x is zero, b and c the other two, of which b is the smaller, and it denotes the length of the oval from left to right. But b may be of any size you please; and if it is made smaller and smaller, the oval becomes less and less; and when b becomes zero, the oval is reduced to a point: i. e., when the two smaller values of x are made equal. The curve shows

a point and also the infinite branch. But when the two larger values of x are made equal, there is no oval or isolated point,—only the infinite branch. Wherefore the same equation may stand for oval or no oval, for point or no point, but always shows the infinite



CURVE REPRESENTED BY EQUATION $ay = \pm \sqrt{x(x-b)(x-c)}$.

branch. But all the values of y are absolutely of one kind; the equation being

$$ay = \pm \sqrt{x(x-b)(x-c)}.$$

If in one example that value should be made to stand for a case of resurrection, then all the innumerable points of the infinite branch should have a like meaning,—and this would be the destruction of the whole argument. The argument, however, is wholly fallacious, and, as hinted in your note, is liable to be considered *ingeniosus quam verius*—“more ingenious than true.”

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